

## **HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

### **Early Explorations**

At the time of the first European explorations of North Carolina, the original inhabitants of the southern Coastal Plain were apparently Siouan-speaking peoples (Swanton 1946). In the northern Coastal Plain, the Algonkians inhabited the Tidewater, and the Tuscaroras were located in the interior (Phelps 1983).

The earliest known explorer to the southern coastal area was Giovanni Verrazano, a Florentine sailor sent out by Francis I of France. Verrazano landed in 1521 at about 34 degrees latitude, a few miles above Cape Fear, where his ships anchored offshore, and friendly natives (Lee 1965) greeted his men.

The first English contact occurred in 1584 when the first of the Roanoke Voyages arrived on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The explorers visited Roanoke Island and sent back glowing reports of the new country. This visit was followed by two attempts to colonize the area, the last group of settlers becoming the "Lost Colony" (Quinn and Quinn 1982).

### **Early Settlement**

By 1705, settlers had established themselves in the Lower Cape Fear, and Archdale Precinct was created as a subdivision of Bath County. The name was changed to Craven Precinct in 1712. By 1722, additional settlement pressures required the formation of a new governmental district, and Carteret Precinct, named to honor Lord Carteret, was created out of Craven. That same year North Carolina became a royal colony. In 1739, the precincts of Bath County were elevated to county status and the parent county was abolished (Corbitt 1950).

John Lawson was an English explorer who was appointed by the Lords Proprietors to make a reconnaissance of the interior of Carolina in 1700. When he returned to England to oversee the publication of his journals, he met a Swiss, Christopher von Graffenried, who was engaged in a plan to resettle a group of Palatine refugees in the New World. He was so enticed by Lawson's accounts of the Carolinas that he chose the area for the resettlement (Todd and Goebel 1920).

The settlement of New Bern in 1710 by Swiss and Palatine refugees under the leadership of Baron von Graffenried and John Lawson was a contributing factor to the Tuscarora War. European settlement had begun pushing up the rivers, and the Tuscaroras saw these settlements aiming at their territory along the Tar and Neuse rivers. The coastal Indians who had already been displaced by the colonists were also moving into the region, and, in addition, a brisk trade in Indian slaves was being conducted. The lower Tuscarora towns were finding themselves in a position of having to stand and fight or be overrun (Paschal 1953).

Small groups of Indians, under the leadership of King Hancock, left the town of Catechna and entered the various settlements along the Neuse, Trent, and Pamlico rivers. On the morning of September 22, 1711, they all attacked at daybreak and massacred the settlers. Between 130 and 140 settlers were killed or wounded and many others captured for slaves. The losses were heaviest among the Swiss and Palatines (Paschal 1953).

The war continued until 1713 when Col. James Moore of South Carolina launched a raid on the main Tuscarora fort, Fort Neoheroka on Contentnea Creek. Nine hundred men, women, and children were killed or captured. The remaining Lower Tuscarora fled toward the headwaters of the Roanoke River, where they were joined by many of the neutral Indians, who feared reprisals (Paschal 1953).

The removal of the Indians opened the interior Coastal Plain to settlement. The earliest settlement in the Goshen Swamp area occurred around 1736. Henry McCulloch of London obtained a royal grant for 72,000 acres between the Black River and the Northeast Cape Fear River on which to settle emigrants from Northern Ireland and Germany (McGowen and McGowen 1971).

Immigrants were induced to come to the region by reports that the climate was good, the living was cheap, fortunes were easily made, and the early arrivals could readily double the value of their land. The first large groups of families were Swiss settlers who arrived around the end of 1736, followed by a colony of Irish who settled on the upper waters of the northeast Cape Fear. Among this group were Colonel Sampson, and the Owens, Kenans, and Walkers. Also settled in upper New Hanover County in present Duplin and Sampson counties was a colony of Welsh whose settlement became known as the "Welsh Tract." In order to encourage such colonization, all groups of Protestants numbering at least 40 persons were exempted from taxation for 10 years (Ashe 1908). The first settlement was in the vicinity of Sarecta at Goshen Swamp, which the settlers named after the biblical land of plenty.

### **Formation of Sampson County**

The current extent of Sampson County is a result of many changing boundaries. Craven County, originally called Archdale, was divided in 1729, and the resulting county was New Hanover. Part of New Hanover later became Duplin in 1750 (Corbitt 1950). As business returned to normal after the Revolutionary War, further subdivision of Duplin County became necessary. In 1784, the General Assembly established Sampson County from the western half of Duplin. The first court of Sampson County was to be held at the house of James Myhand, and the Duplin court, now contained in Sampson County, was to be moved to the public store of James James, located on his plantation (Sikes 1984). The court was moved in 1785 to the present site of Clinton (McGowen and McGowen 1971).

## **The Civil War**

During the Civil War the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad was a vital transportation route and was known as the “lifeline of the Confederacy.” The railroad touched a small part of eastern Sampson County. Supplies reaching Wilmington through the blockades were shipped out on the Wilmington and Weldon (Lefler and Newsome 1954).

The town of Faison (formerly Faison’s Depot), just over the eastern border of Sampson in Duplin County, was the location of the bivouac of General A. H. Terry’s Union forces before and after the Battle of Bentonville. Terry managed to keep good order among his troops in Faison, but Sherman’s “bummers” did make an unwelcome appearance in the countryside (Barrett 1963). A company of Sampson County soldiers was formed by Capt. Frank Faison in Clinton under the name of the Sampson Rangers. They were dispatched to Fort Johnston in present-day Southport (Yearnis and Barrett 1980).

## **Postbellum Period**

As the area recovered after the war, the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad provided transportation to markets. The major crop of Sampson County was corn, although cotton was grown in significant amounts. The large, flat marshes were converted to the cultivation of upland rice, and the wild huckleberry crop was extremely significant to the economy of the county. The 1895 harvest was worth \$100,000 to the county. Other less significant crops included potatoes, tobacco, peas, and sweet potatoes. Timber and hogs were also valuable resources (State Board of Agriculture 1896).

## **Naval Stores**

Naval stores--tar, pitch, and turpentine--were a staple product for which a need existed in the seafaring country of England. Almost as soon as English contact had been made with North America, the potential for exploiting the extensive southern pine forests was recognized.

The new colonies appeared to be a good source for these needed supplies, and the second boatload of settlers bound for Jamestown included Polish tar experts who were to begin developing the American naval stores industry (Underhill 1983).

England had depended on the Baltic States and Russia for naval stores. In unfriendly times, which were frequent, Sweden would cut off the supply of this necessary commodity. To encourage production, the Royal Navy began paying a bounty on naval stores shipped from the colonies (Malone 1964). The Yankee merchants eyed the thick stands of pitch pine in the Carolinas, and before 1705, pitch and tar were being imported into New England for shipment to England.

By 1705, an increasing number of New England vessels were calling in Carolina ports to load casks of pitch and tar. The New England cockleshells could easily negotiate the shallow sounds and inlets leading to the small North Carolina ports (Malone 1964).

Because the quality of colonial tar and pitch was not as good as that of Sweden, Parliament appointed a Surveyor-General of the woods to instruct the colonists in the production of pitch and tar, and to supervise hemp growing. He was also to be a general enforcer of statutory provisions for the protection of forests reserved to the Crown.

Jonathon Bridger, the lone applicant, held the post from 1706 to 1718 and was a “scoundrel whose dishonesty cost his government vast sums of money and whose egotism and foolishness proved more costly still” (Malone 1964:29). Bridger was evidently not too concerned with conservation and management of resources, and was probably lax in quality control, as pitch laced with sand began finding its way to England. This last problem, however, could probably be blamed on merchants’ greed, rather than on Bridger’s lack of concern.

By the end of the colonial period, several North Carolina ports, Beaufort, Bath, and those in Brunswick County, were shipping directly to Great Britain. It was estimated that North Carolina produced seven-tenths of the American tar and one-fifth of the American pitch used in Great Britain before 1776.

In the period 1768-1772, North Carolina ports exported to New England and Britain the following:

<i>Port</i>	<i>Barrels</i>
Currituck	453
Roanoke	76,388
Bath Town	47,610
Beaufort	114, 409
Brunswick	252,443

By contrast, Boston exported 39,663 barrels, but imported 82,731 barrels (Malone 1964:37).

The Naval Board, however, continued its insistence that colonial tar was not fit for ropemaking. Only when some war or disaster cut off the Baltic supply could Colonial merchants demand the prices normally paid for Swedish pitch and tar.

In 1729, bounties were reduced, and South Carolina producers turned their attention to rice and indigo. In North Carolina, forest products did not feel the same competition from agriculture, and manufacture of naval stores remained a more remunerative employment than agriculture (Perry 1967).

By the end of the colonial period, North Carolina produced three-fifths of all the naval stores shipped from the colonies. After the Revolution, the British bounty was cut off and exports from North Carolina declined, especially in the southern part of the state. There was an increase in the Washington-Albemarle Sound region and a gradual westward movement into the Roanoke and Tar river regions.

From 1815 to 1830, exports of tar and pitch declined while exports of crude turpentine, spirits of turpentine, and rosin began a gradual increase. The Federal Census of 1840 recorded a total of 619,106 barrels of naval stores produced in the United States, 593,451 barrels from North Carolina. Craven, Beaufort, and Pitt counties accounted for more than half of the North Carolina total (Perry 1967).

Because records did not always separate naval stores into component parts, it is not always possible to determine how much was tar and pitch and how much was turpentine. It can be assumed that turpentine production was on the increase while tar and pitch production was declining. Turpentine had become more important for its use in lighting fluid (camphene).

Lack of conservation of the pine stands exhausted the raw material after about 10 to 12 years. The second growth wood was not as productive and new areas had to be exploited. An important outgrowth of this move into more remote regions was the construction of a transportation network desperately needed if the state was to prosper. This network, the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, was completed in 1840, just in time for the boom in the naval stores industry. This was reportedly the longest railroad in the world at that time, extending 161 miles through the heart of the longleaf pine forest (Perry 1967).

As North Carolina forest resources were depleted, there was a revival of interest in agriculture. Naval stores, once the pride of the state, were called by some “that great curse to our state because it had drawn so many farmers away from their true interest; the cultivation of the soil” (Perry 1967).

The Civil War was disastrous for the naval stores industry, as most of the production had been exported to northern states. Its bulk and low cost made it unprofitable for blockade-running of shipments. After the war, kerosene replaced camphene as a lighting fluid and turpentine production plummeted. By 1919, North Carolina produced only one-half of one percent of the crop (Perry 1967).

### **Riverboating in Sampson County**

The Black River was an important transportation route to Wilmington for the people of Sampson County during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Riverboats provided the mode of transportation. When the Army Corps of Engineers cleaned out the river channel in 1888, it boosted the economy of the region, as naval stores had begun to decline by that time.

In the February 26, 1970, *Sampsonian*, Jim Parker interviewed Willie Brunson, a former river hand who described the Black River steamboats. They had flat bottoms to navigate shallow rivers and a low deck for loading goods to be sold in Wilmington, such as corn, wheat, cattle, turkeys, turpentine, and tar. The top deck was for passengers, and there was also a dining room. The round trip fare from Clear Run to Wilmington was \$2.00. The boat was loaded in Wilmington with goods for Sampson County merchants. Every plantation or large farm had a landing, and there were commercial landings every few miles to receive Wilmington goods (Bizzell 1983).

The *A. J. Johnson* was a 72-foot-long, 57-ton, stern wheel steamer named for its owner. It was constructed in 1899 by John B. Robinson at Clear Run, and was then towed to Wilmington to be fitted out at Skinner's shipyard. It was captained by J. S. Watson of Point Caswell for its 1900 trial run. Later captains included D. J. Black and W. H. Ward. The boat sank in a 1914 storm, and its owner died in the same year. John F. Johnson of Bladen County salvaged the boiler of the *A. J. Johnson* for use on the *Brook*, and Henry Hunt salvaged the engine for use on the *Oast* (Anglely 1983).